

Bear and Cat Claws



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Introduction

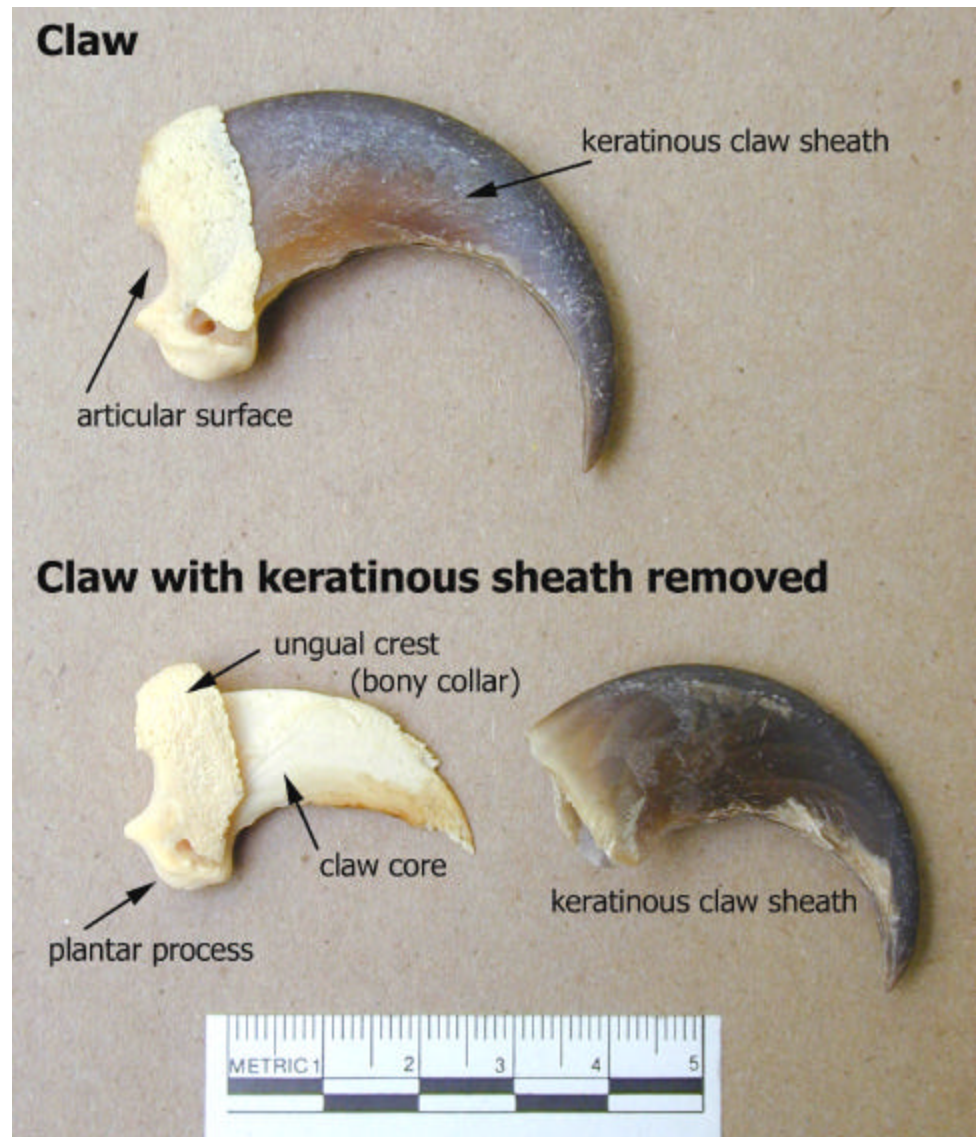
- **PURPOSE:** To provide an introduction to mammal claw morphology and an identification aid for distinguishing bear and cat claws.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** This ID Note can be stored on the users' computer as a PowerPoint file and viewed onscreen or projected as a presentation. It can also be printed (in landscape orientation) and used as a hard copy.
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Introduction

General Claw Morphology

A claw consists of two main parts:

- the bony claw core, which protects the basal end of the keratin and provides internal skeletal support, and
- the keratinous claw sheath which is the most visible part of the claw on a live animal.



Differentiating Bear and Cat Claws

- Ursid (bear) claws can vary in color ranging from dark brown or black, to pale brown and even white. Note the dark color and scimitar-shape of the North American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) claws shown here. Black Bear claws appear regularly in wildlife trade as crafted jewelry pieces.

- Felid (cat) claws are almost semi-circular and pale yellow or amber in color, sometimes translucent. The plantar process on the bony end of the claw is much more pronounced in felid claws. Even large cat claws have a distinct plantar process. Note how different this shape is from the bear claws above.



And there are always exceptions . . .

Panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*) claws are pale in color, but retain their bear-like scimitar shape.



Note the whitish stripes on these older adult specimens and the semi-circular shape.